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The Planning Act Review Committee



Background Paper 4

Citizen Participation in the Preparation of Municipal Plans



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The Planning Act Review Committee

Citizen Participation in the Preparation of Municipal Plans

John Bousfield Associates

Committee

Eli Comay, Chairman
Earl Berger
Eric Hardy

Counsel

Dennis Hefferon

Staff

Gerald Fitzpatrick, Manager
Karen Bricker, Research Associate
Peter McNabb
Margaret Wight

Ministry of Housing staff

Michael Catford
Paul Featherstone
Paul Ross
Evan Wood

Consultants

John Bousfield; Lindsay Dale-Harris;
(John Bousfield Associates)
John Carson (Llewelyn Davies Weeks Canada Ltd.)
Frances Frisken (York University)
Gerald Hodge (Queen's University)
Reg Lang (York University)

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Communications Branch,
Ministry of Housing

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In the course of preparing this paper interviews were conducted with planning directors and senior planning staff in the Regions of Ottawa-Carleton and Waterloo, the Cities of Barrie, Toronto, Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie, the District of Muskoka, the County of Hastings, the Borough of Etobicoke and the Tiny-Tay Peninsula Planning Area. Discussions were also held with officials in the Ministry of Housing. The authors are indebted for their assistance and for the information made available. The observations and findings in this paper, however, are the sole responsibility of the authors, and do not in any sense reflect the views of the persons interviewed or of the organizations they represent.

This report was prepared by John Bousfield and Lindsay Dale-Harris of John Bousfield Associates, and by Karen Bricker of The Planning Act Review Committee.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. PREAMBLE

In Ontario the 1950's witnessed a remarkable growth in planning at the municipal level, a growth which was paralleled by a growth in citizen involvement in the planning process. However, in those years the public was almost exclusively concerned with the determination of individual development control issues. It was not until the late 1960's that citizens became concerned with the broader effects of municipal plan-making. This concern was characterized not only by an increase in the number of people involved, but also in the extent of their demands. It is the role of citizens in the preparation of plans at the municipal level which forms the subject of this report.

Initially public involvement in plan-making was most evident at the local and community level. This was in part a reflection of citizen groups' real interests and in part a response to municipal planning initiatives which were directed, for the most part, to the production of district or secondary plans, and urban renewal schemes. Widespread citizen participation in plan-making developed in major centres in reaction to transportation issues (e.g. Spadina) and urban renewal issues (e.g. Trefann Court, Don Vale). At that time only limited provision was made for any form of participation in the preparation of municipal plans.

Towards the end of the decade public dissatisfaction with the results of municipal planning and discontent with the purely reactive role assigned to citizen groups grew more apparent. Active public involvement was often sparked by a single issue, but attention (at least by group leaders) soon was directed toward altering the overall process of decision making.

As a result of this pressure, participation in plan-making in the 'seventies appears to have received considerable attention and some acceptance by the politicians and professional planners. Today most municipal planning exercises at the neighbourhood, community, city-wide, and regional levels, afford opportunities for public involvement in a multiplicity of ways. Particularly noteworthy are the measures for participation on a wider-than-local basis that have been initiated in recent years. With the advent of regional municipalities and the establishment of county planning areas, broader based plan-making has become more widespread. A large number of regional (or county) official planning programs have been initiated in the past five years and most have actively tried to secure public input throughout the program, and to direct citizen's attention to matters of regional importance. They have met with varying degrees of success

2. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is two-fold. First it is to analyze the objectives and methods, and then assess the effectiveness of a selection of citizen participation programs in influencing the content and production of regional, municipality-wide or neighbourhood plans. This provides a good understanding of the current citizen participation process, based however on a fairly narrow viewpoint.

The second purpose of the report is to look at the whole question of citizen involvement from a wider perspective, and examine citizen participation in civic affairs generally over the past decade. From this analysis some broader trends are discerned, from which a number of conclusions are drawn regarding what ought to be done, and ought not to be done when it comes to re-thinking the legislation as it affects public involvement in the municipal plan-making process.

II THE CASE STUDIES

1. INTRODUCTION

Part I of the Study, while adopting the "case study" approach, does not provide a complete survey of public participation programs in Ontario, nor is it intended to offer judgement as to the benefits vs. the costs of public participation. It will attempt to identify ways in which public and private resources (in terms of time, money, expertise and efficiency) can best be used to involve the public and to accommodate their concerns in final plans. As part of this exercise it will be necessary to consider both the nature of citizen rights to participation, and the limits, if any, of those rights.

2. CONDUCT OF THE STUDIES

Citizen participation programs related to plan-making exercises in the then municipalities listed below were subjected to detailed analysis.

<u>MUNICIPALITY</u>	<u>TYPE OF PLAN</u>
District Municipality of Muskoka	Regional
Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton	Regional
Regional Municipality of Waterloo	Regional
County of Hastings	County
City of Toronto - North Midtown Neighbourhood	Large City - District (Secondary)

<u>MUNICIPALITY</u>	<u>TYPE OF PLAN</u>
City of Hamilton - Durand Neighbourhood	Large City - District (Secondary)
City of Hamilton - Mountview Neighbourhood	Suburban - District (Secondary)
Borough of Etobicoke - District 7	Suburban - District (Secondary)
City of Barrie - Districts 5 and 6	Small City - District (Secondary)
Tiny-Tay Peninsula-Joint Planning Area	Small Town - Rural-Joint
Sault Ste. Marie - Riverfront and West End	Urban Renewal Plans

In these selections an attempt was made to include an example from as many types and sizes of jurisdictions (rural, suburban, urban, neighbourhood, small city, county, region, etc.) and as many kinds of plan-making activities as possible.

Interviews were held with planning directors and senior planning staff.* These were conducted in order to determine a number of aspects about their public participation programs such as: who were the public felt to be; what was the purpose of involving them in the plan-making program; to what extent were they involved; what methods were used to provide for that involvement; what co-ordination was provided between the participation program and the plan-making program; and what was the success of the program. In Hamilton's Durand and Toronto's North Midtown neighbourhoods, some members of the "public" were contacted and public meetings were attended by members of the Study Team. An interview was also held to discuss some of the more general concerns of public participation programs with a consultant of wide experience in the direction of public participation programs in Ontario. It should be emphasized, however, that our understanding of the public participation process in each municipality is based primarily on the observations of the professional planners rather than those of politicians, or members of the public themselves.

* A list of all persons interviewed is provided in Appendix A.

3. LEGISLATIVE BASIS

Section 12 (1) (b) of The Planning Act states:

"Every planning board shall...hold public meetings and publish information for the purpose of obtaining the participation and co-operation of the inhabitants of the planning area in determining the solution of problems or matters affecting the development of the planning area".

Although Planning Boards no longer exist in many jurisdictions, it is noteworthy that The Planning Act makes no requirements of municipal councils regarding public participation. Regional councils are subject to the requirement of the Regional Acts, many of which no longer refer to the need to obtain public participation but rather state that:

"The Regional Council shall...hold public meetings and publish information and all other material necessary for the study, explanation and solution of problems or matters affecting the development of the planning areas". (2)

The Planning Act does not attempt to distinguish between the nature or extent of public participation required in plan-making at the neighbourhood, community, town, city, or regional levels. Furthermore, no specific requirements are provided for participation in Sections 21 and 22, for urban renewal and redevelopment area plans.

The opportunities for appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board against features of municipal plans are provided under Sections 15, 17 and 44 of the Act. However, OMB procedures with regard to notifications are those developed by the Board pursuant to the Ontario Municipal Board Act for purposes of settling development control issues, not for plan-making exercises.

(2) Regional Municipality of Peel RSO 1973 s.55 (1) (b)
Regional Municipality of Halton Act RSO 1973 s.55 (1)(b)
Regional Municipality of Hamilton Wentworth Act 1973 s.55 (1) (b)

As a result of these very general legislative provisions, major opportunities for public involvement are only provided in response to pressures - whether they be from professional planners, politicians, or citizens. As has been mentioned, provisions for citizen involvement vary. In major urban centres they are now reasonably extensive. In some rural and northern areas the Act minimums are the norm - one or more public meetings and perhaps a short pamphlet summarizing the plan proposals may be deemed to fulfil the requirements adequately.

One avenue for citizen involvement provided for under the Act is being used much less frequently. Until recently, the responsibility for all plan-making activities rested with Planning Board, which prior to 1972 has to include a majority of citizen appointees. This provision reflected the belief, widely held in North America in the late 19th and early 20th century, that there should be a clear separation between political and planning activities.

In the past ten years there has been a major shift in this thinking. Planning is now thought of as a political activity, and planning boards are seen not as important components in the system of checks and balances, but rather as barriers restricting the access of citizens to their elected representatives. As a result of this change in attitude, some planning boards have now been reconstituted so that they are composed entirely of elected members of council (e.g. County of Hastings, Borough of York, Borough of Etobicoke). Elsewhere, with the restructuring of local governments, planning boards have been replaced by Planning Committees of Council. Thus one important, although limited, means for citizen involvement is gradually being removed as planning boards disappear from the municipal planning scene.

III FINDINGS

1. IDENTIFICATION OF "THE PUBLIC"

During each interview the Study Team tried to determine if the planners or the politicians had ever attempted to identify their public at the commencement of the plan-making exercise. Unfortunately this matter appeared to have received scant attention. At best it was only possible to distinguish a few common elements among the cases studied in the nature of the public and its general interests.

It appeared that the public could be divided into five groups: elected and appointed representatives; public agencies and institutions; private businesses and institutions; local community and special interest groups; and unorganized individuals. It became evident that each should require a different approach in order to provide adequately for their involvement. Furthermore, the strengths and weaknesses of each group seemed to affect significantly the type and quality of public involvement in the plan-making exercise.

In Sault Ste. Marie, for example, the lack of a strong professional, managerial or academic group to articulate "citizen-at-large" interests was one reason why the Riverfront Scheme was developed without noticeable public input or reaction. This area and its environs were without any resident population - and thus any citizen involvement would have had to stem from a general public concern. Such concern was in fact represented only by public agencies and institutions and the politicians.

In Toronto's North Midtown, the existence of a large professional class and a number of strong, well organized local groups virtually excluded the participation of the unorganized individuals residing in the area from the plan-making process. Furthermore, to a certain extent, the presence of an Advisory Planning Group also removed both appointed (Planning Board) and elected (Council) representatives from the plan-making process. No attempt was made to correct this imbalance during the course of preparing the plan.

On the other hand, in Hastings the strength of the elected representatives and their commitment to preparing a county plan, resulted in the curtailment of the role of all other sectors of the public in plan-making.

Within each of the above categories a further useful distinction should be made between the total public and the citizens who participate. With the exception of elected and appointed officials, rarely was more than a small proportion of the citizens actively involved in plan-making activities at any level, and not surprisingly the larger the total population the smaller the proportion who participated. Second, it became apparent that many of the public who were involved were only concerned about specific development issues. They regarded the plan-making exercise as essentially a large municipality-sponsored development control application. There did appear to be a third, small group of the public who in some instances saw the plan as a policy making document, and who genuinely believed that the plan would be improved by their participation and (in varying degrees) by their control. While some of the latter group looked at the plan from a narrow perspective (how it affected their neighbourhood, or their particular cause, e.g. tree preservation) there were also few who were concerned with the effect of the plan on the larger community or region.

The percentage of the population in each group appeared to shift somewhat from municipality to municipality. For example, in major urban centres the understanding of a plan as a policy document tended to be more widespread than in the northern and rural communities where it was only seen as a development control device, or a comprehensive zoning by-law.

2. PURPOSE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

In almost all interviews conducted, there was a marked inability by planning staff to identify the real purpose of their participation programs, and an uncertainty as to what the programs were intended to achieve. Hastings County and the City of Hamilton provided notable exceptions. As well, there was a general tendency to confuse the extent of participation provided (means) with the objectives of that participation (ends).

Nevertheless while planners were not able to identify the purposes of the citizen participation programs, there did appear to be among the planners three different, although not mutually exclusive, points of view about the effects of public participation. First, there was a small number who supported participation because of a general belief that democratic governments should be more accessible, responsible and accountable in order for the system to work well. The plan might be better or worse, it might take longer or cost more to prepare, but the principle of providing for involvement should be observed.

Second, there was a large group who expected that as a result of participation the plan would be more acceptable, more popular, easier to vote for by the politicians and easier to implement.

Third, there were those who expected that as a result of citizen input the plan would be better. They believed that citizens were better able to clarify issues and define priorities on specific and/or general matters than the planning staff or politicians.

It is important to record that none of those interviewed felt that participation was useless, counter-productive, or to be discouraged. While it might be expected that the majority of politicians would emphasize the role of participation in ensuring the popularity of the plan, this view was rarely acknowledged, let alone clearly articulated by the planners on the politicians' behalf. In fact it appeared the planners gave little thought to the political motives behind their support for or rejection of participation programs.

No canvass of the opinions of the "public" about the purpose of their participation was conducted. However, in the cases studied, there were few attempts made to clarify why the public were being asked to be involved, or to indicate the limits of that involvement. It would appear, therefore, that a major opportunity for conflict might develop as a result of initial misunderstanding as to the purpose of participation by the public as opposed to the planners and politicians.

The type of citizen involvement provided was seldom anticipated by the planners. In fact, four levels of public participation could be identified. At its most basic level citizen participation could be limited merely to providing information and holding meetings. At the second level, citizens once informed, could be asked to react to and comment on certain plans. Joint planning (where citizens actually assist in plan-making) could provide a third level of involvement, and approaches such as advisory committees and task

forces are the usual methods adopted. At the fourth level, control could be totally delegated to the citizens by giving them complete responsibility for the preparation of plans. The majority of the participation programs considered adopted the second approach, only three adopted the third (Hamilton, Toronto North Midtown and West End Sault Ste. Marie), and none the fourth. It would seem logical that the level of participation provided should bear some relation to the perceived purpose of that participation. This was rarely the case.

3. HOW PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS ARE DESIGNED

In the majority of the cases, the public participation programs studied were the first such exercises in connection with plan-making at that particular level (neighbourhood, city-wide, regional) that had been experienced by the planning director. It is true in Waterloo the director had a considerable knowledge of public participation in the preparation of the City of Kitchener planning program and had a detailed knowledge of the area. Somewhat similar situations existed in Ottawa-Carleton and Tiny-Tay. However, in the other areas the directors had had no such experience. Furthermore, many of the planning jurisdictions were newly created (the three Regions, Hastings County and Tiny-Tay) and neither planners, politicians nor citizens had a clear picture at the outset as to the nature of plan which was to be produced.

As a result, few plans seem to have begun with a clear idea of what a participation program should achieve, or how it should be designed. However, the possibility of using the participation program itself to define the nature of the plan, or to outline the participation program's own objectives was not considered in any of the municipalities studied.

In almost all cases an attempt was made to involve the public at an early stage in the plan preparation process, but public interest tended to be greatest in response to specific issues rather than general concerns (e.g. reaction to a preferred plan rather than identification of goals and objectives). As a general rule, the greater the size of the jurisdiction, the greater were the problems in devising a workable program, the smaller the size, the easier.

Techniques for involving citizens were frequently developed in response to what had occurred in the first stages. For example in Regional Waterloo, partially as a result of the contentious series of public meetings which were held to discuss the policy papers, it was decided to hold all day "open houses" rather than further public meetings. These "open houses", which avoided conflict situations, were not anticipated at the outset of the program, and might never have been held if the initial public meetings had proved less acrimonious.

The District of Muskoka was one of the few municipalities which did make a deliberate attempt to design a public participation program at the beginning of the plan-making exercise. However, it must be reported that the original program bore scant resemblance to the one that was eventually followed. As the initial program was well publicized, the subsequent major changes seemed to result in a certain confusion and hostility on the part of the public at large.

For this Study, the City of Hamilton provided the only example where a carefully designed program was in fact followed. The professional planners were fortunate in being able to draw upon past experience in citizen participation and already had a considerable knowledge as to what the neighbourhood plan would need to include. Each step in the participation process (identification of public, collection of information, formation of committee,

determination of goals, preparation of plan, discussion of plan) was clearly ascertained before the plan was begun - and each step was followed by the planners, the public, and the politicians.

Budgets for the various participation programs do not appear to have been determined in any consistent way. Given the lack of any stated purpose, the lack of any fixed components and the general lack of experience in such matters, it is perhaps not surprising that budgets for each program varied from year to year, depending on the commitment of the politicians, the forcefulness of the director, or the state of the plan at that time. In some instances specific budgets were determined on a yearly basis (City of Toronto) and in some a total budget for participation was decided upon at the outset of the program (Hastings). Information for certain areas such as Hamilton - where cost was merely a function of the number of staff assigned to neighbourhood planning - was readily available. However, as this Study progressed, it became evident that it would not be possible to quantify or compare the costs of the various programs in terms of dollars, or of time required, in any consistent way.

In most municipalities (with the exception of Hastings where the official plan was prepared by a consultant) the basic plan-making exercise was conducted by municipal staff, although assistance in varying degrees was provided by consultants. Numbers of staff ranged from one or two (e.g. District Muskoka, Tiny-Tay) who handled all aspects of planning the municipalities, to an organization of considerable size with special members assigned to plan preparation and public participation duties (Ottawa-Carleton). Thus although the amount of staff could be estimated in each municipality the considerable variation made it difficult to draw any conclusions from the collective results.

There did however appear to be a direct relationship between the level of participation provided (information, consultation, decision making) and the amount of staff time required. Both Hamilton-Durand, and Toronto-North Midtown had two planners (the former part-time, the latter full time) assigned to work with the advisory committees and

this much assistance appeared to be essential. In Hastings, where involvement was limited almost exclusively to the "information" level, two professional planners were able to handle the entire planning and participation exercise on a part-time basis.

Because the purpose of citizen involvement in plan-making was poorly expressed, and because the participation programs were developed for the most part on an ad hoc basis, the relationship between purpose and program was seldom adequately considered. Two factors were thought to be of particular importance by many planners in designing their programs. First it was felt that the program should provide accessible and understandable information to the public. Second, it was believed that the program should offer equitable opportunities for all citizens to comment on proposals. Few planners mentioned the need for the politicians or the staff to acknowledge the comments received from the public, and none acknowledged any obligation to state publicly how and why such comments were or were not taken into consideration in producing the final plan. It is noteworthy however that the City of Toronto's North Midtown, which conducted one of the most extensive public participation programs, also placed the most emphasis on publishing and acknowledging all comments received with respect to the plan.

4. THE CO-ORDINATION OF THE PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS AND THE PLAN-MAKING PROCESS

In the public participation programs examined, the major thrust was not directed towards defining how, and at what stages, the participation program would dovetail with the plan-making process. Nor were the possibilities of the development of a participation program over time - with perhaps shifts in the level of the public's involvement, depending upon the stage of the plan-making process - recognized. The main effort was usually to ensure that all plan-making was being done "in public", that all proposals were entirely open to question, and that the whole process was more accountable.

In theory, the ways in which a participation program is related to the plan-making process should take account of what type of participation is sought; over what period of time it is expected to occur; and what it is expected to achieve. It should follow a procedure developed on this basis. In practice, participation programs were not designed in this way. Where and when they are fitted in to the overall process seems to depend more on the political mood (Etobicoke, City of Toronto) or the personality and idiosyncrasies of the planning director (Waterloo, Muskoka) than on any carefully structured approach.

While no two municipalities followed exactly the same procedures, and none (with the exception of Hamilton) began with a clear idea of how co-ordination should be effected, interaction between plan-making and citizen participation usually did occur at four main stages. First, when goals and objectives were being determined; second when information was being collected; third when development alternatives and policies were being put forward and evaluated; and finally when a preferred plan was presented. One further stage of involvement - appealing the approved plan - happened frequently, but this was not considered part of the public participation program in plan-making per se.

The procedures followed by advisory committees and task forces provide a major exception to those outlined above. Co-ordination between the planners and the plan preparation, and special committees or task forces in most case studies was excellent. However, where such committees were present far less co-ordination was evident between the "unorganized public" and the plan-making process.

(a) SELECTION OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Within the four stages outlined above, the differences in approach were significant. The ways in which the selection of goals and objectives were conducted provides an interesting case in point. In Hastings and in Barrie the public were not included in this particular stage. In Muskoka and Tiny-Tay the public was asked to assist in choosing goals and objectives by reacting to a series of proposals prepared by staff. In Ottawa-Carleton the public was asked to identify goals, but minimal suggestions were provided.

In Waterloo the public was asked to respond to twelve different goals and objectives and four development alternatives, but to all intents and purposes, the actual settlement pattern had been selected by staff already. In the City of Toronto's North Midtown and in Hamilton's Durand, the Neighbourhood Planning Committees were charged with the responsibility of determining objectives and the public at large was not consulted. In Etobicoke it appears that the determination of goals occurred after the plan was prepared, and was done by staff rather than the public.

(b) COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

Surveys were regularly used to collect information, and two types of surveys could be identified in the plan-making exercises. The first was usually conducted throughout the entire planning area and was intended to provide an inventory of social and physical information for the plan. The second was a survey of residents' opinions and attitudes - which supplied planners and politicians with useful means to determine citizen preferences. It is the latter type of survey which was considered by the Study Team to form a part of the citizen participation process. However, in some instances (e.g. Durand and North Midtown) the two types were combined in one questionnaire and no such distinction was made by the planners.

It appears from this Study that attitude surveys can contribute to the participation process in two important ways. First they can provide opportunities for the public to make their views known on specific issues. Second they may help to raise citizen interest in the planning process. The costs of such surveys and their severe limitations, if not carefully designed and accurately completed, do however limit their usefulness unless strictly controlled.

There did not appear to be any uniform way of designing and conducting attitude surveys. In Hamilton and Toronto they were carried out as part of the inventory stage and in Hamilton they were also used to help select the Neighbourhood Planning Committee. In Hastings, although a survey was used to provide technical data, it was conducted at a fairly advanced stage in the planning process. In Tiny-Tay and Muskoka, as has been mentioned, the questionnaires formed part of the goals and objectives stage of the plan preparation. Only in one case, Ottawa-Carleton, was a questionnaire used to identify a preferred plan from amongst a number of development alternatives.

(c) COMMENTING ON AND EVALUATING ALTERNATIVES

Commenting on development policies and alternatives was the third area where public involvement was sought. Although this step was frequently omitted, it did play an important role in the plan preparation process in Ottawa-Carleton and lesser roles in Waterloo and Tiny-Tay. In Barrie, Toronto, Hastings and Hamilton, this step was not even considered. In Muskoka, although it was proposed as a part of the program, public comment on alternatives never actually took place.

In Tiny-Tay, one public meeting was conducted to discuss alternative concepts for either official or secondary plans. In addition, literature was circulated, displays were mounted, and informal discussions were held in the local planning office in order to describe the alternatives to members of the public.

Waterloo's four development alternatives were presented at the same time as goals and objectives. Policy papers on all aspects of the future plan were published every few months for approximately one year, and these provided excellent opportunities for comment.

The most extensive public discussion of alternatives took place in Ottawa-Carleton. A specific public participation staff was hired, eight alternatives were presented, and a major public information program was conducted. The public role was seen as one of responding to prepared options.

In Ottawa-Carleton and Waterloo, where the public was given extensive opportunities to comment early on the plans, their involvement throughout the plan preparation process was greater than in other municipalities. This resulted in the addition of more information to the plan and the clarification of certain issues, but it did not reduce the citizens' concerns about what they considered to be important issues. Later public response to certain issues such as growth, regional powers, and the role of the public in the decision making process was vigorous, notwithstanding the earlier public discussion of alternatives. Early involvement by no means assured the ultimate acceptability of the plan.

(d) REACTION TO PREFERRED PLANS

In the cases studied, the most important opportunity for citizen involvement was provided when the final plan was presented to the public. It was usually at this stage that reaction was the strongest and it was at this stage that the greatest delays were encountered. It would also appear that despite opportunities to involve the public in the earlier stages of plan preparation, public interest was greatest at the time the draft plan was presented.

A suitable example is provided in Regional Waterloo. The October 1974 Policy Papers (which were initially intended to form a draft Official Plan) were strongly attacked and by June the following year the entire plan had been substantially rewritten. In Ottawa-Carleton, partly as a result of public comment, two preliminary drafts (Initial Proposals September 1972, First Draft August 1973) and one final draft were prepared - and this stage of the planning program took more than two years.

In Muskoka, discussion of the Working Draft is expected to take a considerable length of time, and it is fully anticipated that as a result of comments from the public, the municipalities, and public agencies the Plan will be substantially rewritten. In Etobicoke, public meetings held to discuss successive District 7 Plans resulted in major land use changes being made to the plan, and the process continued over several years. Only in Hastings where meetings were held to discuss specific designations and where no basic policies were open to question, and in Hamilton where a rigid schedule was adhered to, did public involvement at the presentation of the draft plan not lengthen the process and this was true notwithstanding any steps taken at earlier stages to involve the public.

5. TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED

There was a great similarity of techniques used by the various planning agencies in order both to inform the public and respond to expressed concerns. For ease of comparison, the various methods adopted have been grouped into three categories: those which provided information (e.g. literature), those which solicited information (e.g. questionnaires), and those which attempted to do both (e.g. public meetings). Each of these is discussed below.

(a) PROVIDING INFORMATION

In assessing the merits of the methods adopted to offer information, it is helpful to remember that there are four quite different functions for that information: first, it may be used to provide knowledge about the plan-making process in general; second, it can also be used to provide specific details about the participation program in question; third, it can be used to illustrate the various elements of the plan as they are produced; and finally it can offer an explanation as to how people's concerns were dealt with.

The various ways in which information was provided are described below:

(i) SPECIAL LITERATURE

While it was never the only technique used, the provision of special literature about the plan was considered essential to any kind of program. It was felt that literature provided the most accessible form of information for the public.

The way in which the literature was put forward appeared to be as important as its actual content. Where it was poorly written and badly presented, negative reaction far outweighed any benefits that might have accrued. The more complex the issues discussed, the more skill the presentation required, and the less constructive the public reaction if it was not handled well.

Various forms of special literature were distributed, ranging from summaries of policy papers, printed as a newspaper tabloid (Waterloo) to monthly newsletters (Tiny-Tay). All municipalities used broadsheets, one page handouts, etc. to advertise public meetings, public presentations and public displays. These were frequently distributed through the schools or by local ratepayer associations. However, in none of the cases studied was any attempt made to reach a specific sector of the public (.e.g. ethnic groups, working class areas) by using any special form of literature.

In large metropolitan areas such as Ottawa-Carleton and Waterloo, the volume of written material circulated was enormous: 95,000 copies of the Waterloo newspaper tabloid on Goals and Objectives were circulated, and 110,000 copies of the Ottawa-Carleton development alternatives were printed. In comparison only 400 copies of the Tiny-Tay Newsletters were circulated.

(ii) PUBLIC DISPLAYS

About half of the municipalities studied used public displays to inform the citizenry. Usually the displays were staged to advertise the highlights of a plan to be discussed at an upcoming public meeting - although occasionally, as in Tiny-Tay, they were held merely to inform the public about more general planning initiatives. The most extensive series of displays was conducted in Hastings - where they were used to indicate all the land use designations at a large scale. Etobicoke, Hamilton, and Waterloo all used displays to supplement their plan presentation exercises.

(iii) MEDIA

In the City of Toronto and the Regions of Waterloo and Ottawa-Carleton, radio and television were used to publicize any developments in the planning program, and any upcoming planning documents which were being published. Outside these major urban areas virtually no use was made of television or radio.

Newspapers were used consistently by all municipalities. Notification in the press of public meetings still proved to be the most popular way of informing the general public. Local reporting about meetings, biased though it might be, also helped to increase the public's awareness about planning, and assisted in defining issues.

Because of their wide circulation, newspapers were used as special literature in some instances. In Ottawa-Carleton and Muskoka for example, a special planning supplement and questionnaire were included in a regular newspaper edition. In other areas the press was used for publishing one page summaries of the plans.

(iv) WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS

While it might seem that workshops and seminars should be considered as part of the two-way information system, in most cases (Muskoka, Ottawa-Carleton, Hastings) they were held almost exclusively to provide information about the plans and to inform people (usually staff and politicians) about the benefits of planning. Evidently, very little information was derived from them which could actually be used by the planners in formulating a plan for the area, although in areas where the level of the public's understanding of the planning process was felt to be low, planners found them invaluable. In these cases planners felt they provided an excellent forum in which they could easily describe the planning process, explain basic planning issues, and draw attention to those matters which they felt were of concern.

b) OBTAINING PUBLIC RESPONSE

(i) Written Briefs and Submissions

Typically in all municipalities canvassed, the public was asked to respond to the initiatives of staff and politicians by submitting letters and briefs. The number submitted varied considerably depending upon the size of the jurisdiction, the extent of the participation program, the amount of controversy aroused and the opportunities provided for response. 39 briefs were submitted on initial goals in Ottawa-Carleton, 200 briefs on the first draft Official Plan. In Hastings, response to the final draft - prompted by a letter sent by Planning Board to all landowners - was even greater. On the other hand, only 11 written submissions were made on the final District Plan in Etobicoke.

In some cases the briefs were summarized and published in several volumes (Ottawa-Carleton, City of Toronto) and in others they were merely distributed to all Planning Board members (Etobicoke). However, as far as can be determined only where a submission was accompanied by a formal deputation, were its contents directly considered by the politicians, or dealt with on a point-by-point basis by staff. One exception to this was North Midtown, where a considerable amount of time and effort has been spent by both staff and politicians in reviewing comments. Nowhere was there any accounting of how the briefs were accommodated in the final plan. However, as part of the overall citizen input, the briefs and submissions did result in the planners justifying the plan they had selected, and explaining their assumptions to the public and the politicians.

(ii) QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEYS

Seven of the municipalities used questionnaires or other forms of surveys in order to obtain either general information about the residents' attitudes and concerns or statistical data about the study area and its population. While the results of these surveys were usually available to the public, in no case were the implications of the surveys discussed with the public at large.

Where a questionnaire was well handled it was very useful in identifying those policy questions where greater citizen involvement was warranted, in obtaining data, or in indicating preferences, all of which could be helpful as a basis for policy and program formulation. The benefits derived from questionnaires, in most cases, appeared to be directly related to the time and expertise invested in their preparation. Good questionnaires provided both staff and politicians with qualitative and quantitative information of considerable value.

This proved to be the case in Toronto's North Midtown, Hastings, and Hamilton, where the responses were excellent. Where the questionnaire was not well designed, and where it was poorly presented (e.g. Muskoka) results were disappointing. In Ottawa-Carleton the questionnaire was so badly designed that it seemed to generate a good deal of hostility to the entire planning program.

(c) INFORMATION AND RESPONSE

(i) Public Meetings

Public meetings were held universally in order to publicize the plan and obtain public response. Only in Waterloo were public meetings forsaken for open houses. While the planners' views as to the value of public meetings were not unanimous, there was a general consensus that meetings were reasonably effective. The planners also agreed that about 40 - 50 persons was a "good size" for such a meeting. However, the conduct of meetings and the response received varied widely depending on location (urban/suburban/rural), on issues (economic growth/recreation/conservation), and on the chairman's proficiency.

Minutes were kept at most public meetings. In certain of the large municipalities, legal secretaries were employed to record the meetings, and detailed reports were published.

It appears in some instances that the points raised (e.g., environmental concerns in Waterloo), did receive further investigation as a result of the queries. However, once again, requests were rarely formally acknowledged, and no reasons were given as to why certain recommendations were included or rejected in the final plan.

The advantages of meetings were of two kinds. First, if they were well attended by staff and politicians - which was felt to be very important by most planning directors - they improved the accountability of the plan immeasurably, as those responsible for it were obliged to explain and defend it. Second, the meetings encouraged group interaction, and at times confrontation - which when handled well by the chairman did more to dramatize the issues and identify the tradeoffs than any number of submissions or briefs. Such meetings also played a major role in informing citizens and in providing more detailed information than was normally available in plan summaries and newspaper circulars.

The shortcomings of public meetings were also well recognized. For example, how representative the spokesmen were of neighbourhood and community views was sometimes open to question and as a result, any consensus reached at meetings could be easily challenged. It is well known that meetings can be taken over by specific groups with particular hobby horses as occurred, for example, in Waterloo. A large gathering may intimidate some people who are reticent in public. A rude section of the audience, an inept chairman, faulty acoustics, lack of good visual aids can all contribute to a fiasco instead of a constructive step in the plan-making process.

(ii) Open Houses (all day informal meetings)

While in many ways open houses are similar to public meetings, they differ in two major respects. First, confrontation is avoided or defused. No 'adversary' situation is created where opposing views can be discussed, issues crystallized and points made before an audience. Second, in open houses, the politicians and planners are distinctly less accountable than when exposed on a public platform where they may be open to sharp questioning. However, it seems that open houses may be most effective for disseminating information, and may greatly assist in securing public views as to priorities and issues, particularly amongst the sector of the public which feels ill at ease at public meetings, but wishes to make a definite contribution to the planning process. Waterloo was the only municipality studied where open houses were held instead of public meetings and this change occurred only part way through the plan-making process.

(iii) Advisory Committees and Task Forces

Advisory Committees were used in several municipalities. Their responsibilities ranged from preparing an entire neighbourhood plan in close co-operation with staff planners (e.g., Toronto-North Midtown and Hamilton-Durand), to preparing sections of a plan covering limited areas of concern (Muskoka-Tourism and Industry, Waterloo - Environmental).

In cases where an advisory committee was involved, the role of that particular sector of the public was very much more creative. Paradoxically, the role of the public at large was generally much less extensive. The advisory committee determined goals and objectives and worked closely with the planning staff in developing the plan. Their work was, in theory, under the direction of the professional staff and required political support and acceptance in order to be adopted and implemented. In fact, the politicians tended to assume a reactive role in order to protect what they perceived to be their interests and those of the public at large.

The advisory committee approach appears to have a number of advantages. First, it enables the planning staff to use the resources and expertise in the community to identify concerns and develop a specific plan or policy. Second, it enables the public at large, through a few key spokesmen, to contribute in an informed and creative way to the planning process. Because of the small number of people involved, the flow of information between committee members, staff, and politicians seemed to be good and co-ordination between citizen and staff activities excellent. It appears that the positions of the participants were fairly clearly defined and understood.

Third, the advisory committee approach creates a pressure group through which political lobbying can be carried out effectively. Finally, it provides a mechanism for sustaining public involvement on a continuous basis in the plan preparation and implementation process. An example is provided by the West End block committees in Sault Ste. Marie.

The shortcomings of advisory committees and task forces must be weighed against their benefits. First, in several instances, the committees became non-professional planning staff for all practical purposes. This did not result in an increase in the numbers of opportunities afforded for the participation by the general public. In fact, the committees were frequently less receptive than the professional planning staff to input from the general public. Second, such committees found it difficult to work within an already established broad policy framework (as witnessed in North Midtown). They seemed to expect to establish policies exclusively for their own particular area. Third, individual committee members were sometimes open to conflicts of interests which were not always declared. Property owners, tenants, and professionals alike, as members of an advisory committee, were in a position to derive personal gain by advocating certain policies, or recommending certain land use designations. Few rules of conduct were established to regulate such situations. Fourthly, it is evident that because of their exposure to more information and different planning perspectives than the average resident, committee members can come to judge issues in a very different light than the "uninformed" public. This was most evident in North Midtown where the final plan included a level of commitment to providing low income housing and social services for low income groups which did not reflect the views of the more conservative element of the community. Finally, there is a discernible tendency for task force members to see themselves as deciders, not as advisers. When their advice is not accepted unquestioningly by staff and politicians, some committee members may become disillusioned, if not hostile and unco-operative.

For these reasons, it seems clear that advisory committees should not be thought of as a substitute for other forms of public participation - but rather as one approach among many. Where such committees are established, it seems essential that the interests of other residents must be safeguarded by providing other more conventional ways of public involvement.

(iii) Special Staff

Only in a few cases (Ottawa-Carleton, Waterloo, North Midtown), were special staff employed for the public participation program. In Waterloo, they were employed to prepare the literature summarizing the plan, and in Ottawa-Carleton, staff was hired to analyze briefs and to provide general information for the public. In the City of Toronto, the North Midtown Planning Group interviewed and engaged the planners who were to work with them in drawing up a plan. In Hamilton, while regular staff was assigned to the neighbourhood planning committees, they still carried out their duties within the Neighbourhood Section of the Planning Department. Only in Ottawa-Carleton and in Toronto has a permanent staff member been retained to continue the liaison established with the community groups on a full time basis. Given the limited budgets on which many of the smaller municipalities must operate, this is a relatively costly method of providing for staff/public coordination. However, in larger municipalities, the existence of a public liaison and information officer may offer an effective way of providing for on-going public participation in plan-making and implementation.

(iv) Other Techniques

A number of other methods were used to inform and respond to the public. For example, in Muskoka, an umbrella stand erected on the mainstreet of the major towns was used to advertise the District Plan and answer questions. Evidently its success during the vacation months was only limited - in part because of the level of expertise of those staffing the stand. In Tiny-Tay, a high school program focusing on the plan and featuring question and answer sessions and debates with planning board members and students was conducted. It succeeded in stimulating interest amongst the students and consequently drew some attention from parents.

6. IMPACT ON THE PLANS

(a) THE PLAN CONTENT

It is exceedingly difficult for one not closely involved in each planning exercise to determine the measurable impact of the citizen participation programs on any of the final plans. None of the municipalities successfully demonstrated in interviews or in writing what the effect of public participation had been on the plans which resulted.

During the interviews, an attempt was made by the Study Team members to determine whether or not the interviewees believed their program to be effective - and if so, how they measured its effectiveness. It became apparent for the most part that the planners had not considered their programs in this light, and that a common measurement of "success" did not exist.

However, it was possible to some extent to draw distinction between the citizens' impact on large scale plans, and on local and neighbourhood plans. At the regional level (Muskoka, Ottawa-Carleton, Waterloo and Tiny-Tay), public involvement was seen as helping to define priorities by highlighting concerns, and by providing the professional planners with an indication of the public's views. The emphasis which different components of the plans were given (public transit, environmental concerns, industrial and overall growth) was felt to be, in large measure, a result of citizen concerns. The eight public forums which were held in Ottawa and which covered specific issues such as transportation, central area employment and social services furnish one example. The Environmental Sub-Committee which was established in Waterloo and whose work affected the overall environmental section for the Region, provides

a second. In Tiny-Tay, the priorities given by the area residents in the questionnaire determined which policy papers should be prepared and when.

In these municipalities, it is evident that the participation process forced the planners and the politicians to account publicly for their statements, to explain their assumptions, demonstrate the implications, and justify their choices.

Once these things were done, the plans became more understandable to the public and easier to support politically. In most cases, the plan had actually changed very little - but people's perception of it had substantially altered.

At the local level, it is far easier to identify actual instances where land use changes were brought about as a result of public pressures. The District 7 Plan in Etobicoke provides a typical example of the type of changes made to a land use plan in response to various public groups. The changes in land use and density which occurred along the motel strip were direct results of citizen pressures. In Hamilton, in both the suburban and the central city area plans, one can identify specific locations where densities have been reduced, and designations changed to reflect the views of the neighbourhood committees or local residents. In Toronto's North Midtown, it was the citizen planning group that formulated the policies concerning mixed use development and residential development. In Sault Ste. Marie, in the West End Urban Renewal Scheme, citizen block committees were responsible for altering the major thrust from redevelopment to rehabilitation. Hastings provides an example of detailed changes being made to a county-wide plan as a result of citizen concerns.

(b) THE PLAN PREPARATION PERIOD

While in most cases it is clear that citizen participation ultimately lengthened the plan preparation period, what is not clear is the extent to which delays were caused by inexperienced management on the part of the planning staff, and to what extent they are part and parcel of the nature of citizen involvement, regardless of how skillfully it is handled. More importantly, it is almost impossible to determine the extent to which the approval stage would have been lengthened if the plan preparation phase had not permitted any public input. Exclusion of citizens from any knowledge of the plan-making process might have been far more time consuming in the end.

In Hamilton, although the plan-making process was streamlined in order to fit into a certain time limit, a neighbourhood group did in fact produce a plan while adhering to its ten week schedule, and only minor delays were experienced.

In North Midtown, no overall schedule was either drawn up or followed, and the plan took over three years to prepare. The absence of any real pressure to produce a plan in the first two years of the Planning Group's existence also contributed to the delay. In fairness, however, it must be noted that delays were also caused by the heavy workload of development control and other short term matters which had to be dealt with by the Advisory Committee. Considerable delays have been experienced since the publication of the draft plan because of the extensive comments received and because of the political commitment to recognizing and considering these comments.

In Muskoka, the draft plan took over four years to emerge - but very little time was spent on citizen involvement. Most of the delay was occasioned by the need to produce interim criteria, and to resolve conflicts with the local municipalities. At this writing, the plan preparation process is still not complete, and further delays occasioned by public participation may be expected.

In Ottawa, the preliminary drafts of the plan were in circulation for over a year (September 1972 - January 1974). Additional studies were undertaken and important shifts in priorities were made throughout this period as the result of comments made at the public forums and the recommendations of the written submissions.

In Waterloo, the plan preparation process took less than three years even though approximately eight months were spent reviewing and rewriting the draft plan as a result of public participation. It is noteworthy that once the Plan came before Council, the actual approval stage required only a few weeks.

It does not appear that citizen involvement in the early stages of the plan-making exercise necessarily lengthens the total process. Rather, it seems that if an efficient schedule for participation is developed, citizen involvement can readily be co-ordinated with other components of plan preparation, and need not add to the time required for collecting and analyzing information, verifying assumptions, etc. Participation does appear to cause lengthy delays in cases where a major re-evaluation of the plan is called for towards the end of the exercise. However, it would be unrealistic to assume that with careful planning, well designed programs, and excellent information, all or even most delays could be avoided, or that all conflicts could be resolved. It must be recognized that major differences of opinion may arise and may never be reconciled, and that efforts to develop a politically acceptable document are likely to be extremely time consuming.

(c) THE APPROVAL PHASE

Too few of the plans selected for this study have been finally approved to reach any firm conclusions about the impact of the participation program on the approval phase.

In general, it was felt that where the participation program had improved the accountability of the plan and increased its acceptability, the approval phase (and subsequent implementation processes), at the municipal level could be easier and quicker. Furthermore, it was widely held that the likelihood of receiving full support for municipal planning policies both from the Minister and the Ontario Municipal Board could be far greater if it could be shown that a concerted effort had been made to involve all those affected, and to accommodate as many views as possible.

While it is sometimes argued that by encouraging the public to become interested in plan-making, by raising issues, and by encouraging confrontations, the number of objections to the final plan is likely to be increased; this does not seem to be the case.

There seems to be no consistent pattern from which conclusions may be drawn in this, a very critical aspect of public participation. In Ottawa-Carleton, for example, a large number of appeals to the plan are being launched, but for the most part, these are by developers who most probably would have kept themselves informed of the plan-making process regardless of the participation program. In the City of Toronto, while it does appear that there will be a considerable delay because of the number of submissions, it seems that in all likelihood the North Midtown Plan will be carried through by the Advisory Committee with only a few appeals. Likewise in Hastings, adoption of the plan by County Council was a straightforward matter and only two appeals are now expected to go to OMB. On the other hand, in Etobicoke it is true that citizen participation has complicated and lengthened the approval phase of the District 7 Plan, notwithstanding the extensive participation earlier in the process.

The land use designation on the motel strip was appealed to the OMB, and the Board's decision was appealed by the local ratepayers to the Ontario Cabinet.

IV. CASE STUDIES - SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

Acknowledging the narrow viewpoint upon which the case studies have been focused, especially in terms of the number of municipalities canvassed and the number of persons interviewed in each case, it is still thought that some conclusions can be drawn which could be useful, specifically in the development of other citizen participation programs.

(a) IDENTIFICATION OF "THE PUBLIC"

Although little attention was directed by planning staff to the identification of "the public", it was possible to distinguish a number of common elements in the nature of the public among those cases studied. The public could be divided into five groups: elected and appointed representatives; public agencies and institutions; private businesses and institutions; local community and special interest groups; and unorganized individuals.

Within each of the above categories a distinction may be drawn between the total public and those who participate - for rarely was more than a small proportion of the total citizens involved in plan-making activities at any level. (The larger the total population in any jurisdiction, the smaller the proportion who participated.) Many of those who did participate were only concerned about specific development control issues rather than overall policy, and only a very few saw the plan as a policy making document and were concerned with anything beyond their own narrow perspective.

(b) PURPOSE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Planning staff found it difficult to identify the purpose in involving the public in the preparation of official plans; to consider the motives behind political acceptance (or lack of it) for the program; or to turn their attention to the different and at times conflicting objectives of citizens in becoming involved. Little thought was given to matching an appropriate level of citizen involvement with the political or professional purposes of that involvement; and misunderstandings between the citizens, politicians and planners were numerous. In consequence, political support for participation was sometimes difficult to sustain.

(c) HOW PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS ARE DEvised

Few programs were developed with any clear idea of what could and should be achieved. This was a direct result of lack of experience in public participation in plan-making exercises on the part of the planners, politicians and the public. No attempt was made to use the public participation program itself to help determine either the nature of the plan-making program or the extent of public participation desired.

Where there was an absence of any scheduled program or fixed objectives, co-ordination between the plan preparation process and the participation program was poor. Estimates of budget, staff and time required were inaccurate. Furthermore, explanations to citizens of when and why their involvement would be sought were unsatisfactory.

While planners usually seemed to recognize the importance of providing accessible and understandable information for all sectors of the public, the need to offer adequate and equitable opportunities for

public comment on the plan when it was being prepared, and the necessity of justifying the plan once selected, they seemed unaware of the need to acknowledge comments which were not heeded, or to explain why they were not taken into account in the final plan.

(d) THE CO-ORDINATION OF THE PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS
AND THE PLAN-MAKING PROCESS

More attention is paid at the present time to the importance of preparing plans "in public" than to the ways public comments are related back to the plan-making process.

In those cases studied, the opportunities for public involvement occurred primarily at four stages: selection of goals and objectives; collection of information; commenting on and evaluating alternatives; and reacting to preferred plans. In most cases, public interest was greatest at the fourth stage, i.e., at the time the draft official plan was presented.

In those municipalities where the public were given extensive opportunities for early comment on the plan, involvement throughout the plan preparation was greatest. While this tended to improve the flow of information and to clarify some of the issues, it by no means assured that the plan would ultimately be more acceptable.

(e) TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED

It is apparent that where public participation programs are adopted the techniques used to implement the program should be selected and structured in accordance with known objectives and a clear picture of the "public" that will participate.

While all municipalities used similar techniques in order to involve the public, it was difficult because of differing circumstances, objectives and personal styles to compare their success in affording adequate opportunities in public involvement. What is clear is that all techniques encountered have certain merits, that no single approach is adequate for all circumstances, and that those techniques which provide for the fullest levels of participation are also the most costly in terms of money and staff time.

It is also clear that the planners usually failed to distinguish between the different types of information required: information about plan-making in general; about the specific participation program; about the components of the plan as they are produced; and about how people's concerns will be dealt with. The need for a program to provide all four different types of information was not recognized, nor was the principle that it is necessary to ensure that such information should be equally accessible to the entire public in order to provide, as far as possible, that citizen input is broadly based.

The advisory committee approach appeared to offer the greatest hope for the "joint" involvement of certain sectors of the public. It provided good co-ordination between staff and citizens; enabled staff to use the resources and expertise of the community in a constructive way; and provided a mechanism for sustaining public involvement on a continuous basis in the plan preparation and implementation process. This technique was also found to be the most likely to become unrepresentative of the interests of the majority of the community and to provide fewer opportunities for the public at large to become involved in plan-making. To a certain extent, advisory committees tended to usurp the role of the politicians in determining both development control and policy issues.

(f) IMPACT ON THE PLAN

(i) The Plan Content

Citizen involvement appears to have a different effect on plans at the local, and at the city-wide or regional level. At the local level, it results primarily in changes to land use designations. In broader based plans, it results in a clarification of issues and priorities. In both cases it results in an improvement in the overall accountability of the plan.

(ii) The Plan Preparation Period

Citizen involvement usually lengthens the plan preparation process somewhat, but this seems to be as much the fault of inexperienced management as it is of citizen demands. Where a predetermined schedule was followed which was carefully co-ordinated with the plan preparation process, unnecessary delays were avoided.

It would be unrealistic to assume that with careful planning, well designed programs, and an excellent flow of information all delays will be avoided. Major differences of opinion may never be reconciled, and efforts to develop an acceptable document may be extremely time consuming. What one cannot verify is the extent to which the plan approval and implementation phases would be substantially lengthened by confrontation resulting from the exclusion of the public from the plan preparation phase.

(iii) Approval Phase

Inasmuch as public participation was felt to improve the accountability of the plan and increase public acceptance of planning policies, it was also considered to ease the approval phase. Considerable weight was also given to the opinion of the Ontario Municipal Board about the importance of public participation in plan-making when considering appeals.

(g) SUMMARY

Patently, the shortcomings of citizen participation programs which were studied have two principal causes: first, a failure on the part of planners and politicians to consider what participation was meant to achieve and to design programs accordingly; secondly, a lack of experience on the part of planners, politicians and the public in participation in any plan-making exercises.

It is equally clear that certain problems - delays and confrontations - are inevitable, and in certain instances, beneficial. Regardless of the experience of the participants, or the design of the program, conflicts are to be expected. Many citizen concerns are not founded on a rational argument and it would be unrealistic to assume they can be allayed by a process that seeks to be rational.

It would appear that the experience gained, the techniques used and the programs adopted have only a limited application outside the jurisdiction for which they were developed. Even municipalities of similar sizes show marked differences in what steps are needed and what measures are effective.

The "public" varies greatly from municipality to municipality, and it is the public's response which is critical. In certain municipalities, notably those with a strong professional, managerial or academic base, interest in both area-wide planning concerns and local planning issues is quite wide-spread, as in Waterloo and Ottawa-Carleton. In other communities where such groups are small or absent, public interest in broad issues is almost entirely lacking. While it appears comparatively easy to raise people's interest in the affairs of their own particular block or neighbourhood, gaining support for area-wide concerns proves to be extraordinarily difficult and frequently unproductive.

Furthermore, it would appear that no matter how carefully a program is designed, perhaps it's most essential characteristic is an ability to respond swiftly and flexibly to unforeseen concerns raised by the public. While a program should not be based solely on reaction to what had occurred previously - an element of this must be provided for.

If these basic premises are accepted, the implications for planning legislation are the following:

- (a) There appears to be little merit in attempting to institutionalize any one approach to participation (such as an advisory committee modelled on the North Midtown Planning Group) through ministerial regulations issued pursuant to the Act. It would also seem to be of little advantage to try to formalize through regulatory guidelines any one procedure or set of procedures. The very different nature of the public in each municipality, and the varying issues which emerge from area to area would indicate that a greater benefit would be gained if such matters were determined on an individual basis at the local level.

- (b) There does, however, appear to be a definite need for administrative, technical, and in certain cases, financial assistance for municipalities for the development of their citizen participation programs. The lack of experience is vast. The determination of staff needs, resource allocations, and program direction are all areas where expert counselling would be invaluable. Because of its extensive field services, it is felt that this assistance should be provided by the Community Planning Advisory Branch, upon request, as part of its on-going service to municipalities in planning matters.

For the reasons stated above, it does not appear to be useful to prepare a standard manual setting out detailed guidelines describing a 'typical' program in order to assist municipalities in the design and conduct of participation programs. What would be 'typical'? However, a short publication explaining the basic analytical and practical framework for developing a program might be of considerable merit. Such a publication could also contain a summary of the differences which might be encountered in such programs at the local and regional level; plus a brief description of the methods for participation available, and those which are most effective for providing and receiving information. It should also include a clear explanation of the necessary links between plan-making activities, and participation activities.

- (c) Not enough information was obtained from the municipalities to teach any firm conclusions with regard to the need for financial assistance for the development and administration of programs. As no interviews were conducted with "the public", no attempt was made to assess their needs. It may be that financial assistance from the Province may be justified, and it may be thought useful that the Minister of Housing be given specific powers to provide grants for public participation in programs deemed by him to be acceptable and needy. Such assistance could be administered through the Community Planning Advisory Branch.

V. THE BROADER PERSPECTIVE

As has been described in the introduction to this report, the growth of the citizen participation movement in Ontario has not been a recent phenomenon. Rising interest in this field has been noted since the early 1950's. The Ontario Economic Council's Report (1973) "Subject to Approval" traced the rapid expansion of citizen activity in development control issues in the early 'sixties when high-rise apartment buildings began to appear in large numbers. Beginning with Mallory Crescent in 1966, and through his subsequent series of decisions in major rezoning applications in the City of Toronto, J.A. Kennedy, Q.C., then Chairman of the Ontario Municipal Board, became the first major public official to adopt as policy the primacy of 'citizen' interests (as opposed to 'official' or 'development' interests) in the planning issues when came before him. The Ontario Government's Spadina decision in June, 1971 was an early and dramatic recognition of the political value to be gained from supporting citizen participation, and the Crombie victory in the Toronto civic elections of 1972 probably removed any lingering doubts. The momentum was easily strong enough to carry into office many like-minded candidates in the 1973 elections in the adjacent regional municipalities, and in the Metro civic elections of 1974, most candidates were still trying to "out-participate" one another.

In consequence, citizen groups grew and proliferated, and their interests were no longer centred exclusively on local affairs. Ratepayers associations coalesced to form federations which tackled Metro as well as the local governments, and even pursued provincial and federal agencies in matters of city-wide or regional significance. The Metro Centre hearing was perhaps the high water mark of the Confederation of Residents and Ratepayers Association (C.O.R.R.A.) in Metropolitan Toronto.

It is important to remember how closely citizen participation in civil affairs was identified with 'no-growth', or at least 'slow growth' during this period. Although the term 'zero-growth' was not in general use at the time, the words "citizen participation" and "anti-development" were virtually synonymous. Paradoxically, the citizen participants who were most energetic and most vocal in their opposition to growth and development tended to be drawn from middle class groups whose new-found social status and material prosperity derived in large measure from the rapid economic expansion of the preceding decades. There are probably many reasons why this should have been so. At the local level, it was perhaps only to be expected that neighbourhood battles against high-rise apartments should nurture anti-growth feelings. As well, there was undoubtedly a broader concern in the minds of many, a disenchantment with some of the real or imagined by-products of growth such as pollution, congestion, and social unrest. These issues were dramatized best perhaps in the Club of Rome's celebrated publication 'The Limits of Growth', issued in 1972.

The impact of all of these changes and events on many of the senior professional planners was unnerving, to say the very least. Educated and trained during the expansionary post-war years, their careers had been devoted as much to promoting growth as managing it. The policies they formulated and the programs they proposed reflected the long and continuing alliance between the province, the municipalities, and the development industry. It came as a profound shock to many planners that the public's attention, which they had long sought to attract, manifested itself in vehement opposition to almost everything the planners had held to be sacred.

Many of the planning old guard have resigned their civic posts, but those who survived, and the replacements of those who did not, quickly became dedicated apostles of the new participation creed. It was as if they were determined never again to allow themselves to drift so far from the mainstream of public thought. (3)

In 1972-73 then, there was a coming together of a number of new forces of great significance for municipal plan-making activity:

- First, there was the majority of 'new broom' politicians, resolved to produce new policies and new plans which reflected their views and those of their constituents on growth and development.
- Secondly, there was the fairly widespread network of citizen groups with energetic memberships, buoyed by recent electoral successes and eager to have a direct hand in establishing new anti-growth plans and policies.
- Thirdly, were the badly shaken professional planners, anxious to avoid the confrontations and the misjudgements of the recent past.

For each of these groups, citizen participation was not something that was merely to be accepted. Public participation was an objective to be sought after, to be promoted and created if necessary. Almost overnight it now seems, citizen participation became imperative. It was the number one priority in all municipal plan-making exercises.

All of this was occurring during the period when about a dozen new regional municipalities came into being, each with its legislative requirement to produce a regional plan within a specified time frame. At the same time, many of the re-shaped lower-tier municipalities also decided to establish their own planning policy frameworks in order to forestall regional domination. Provincial funds made available

(3) The Ontario Planning and Development act of 1973 stands as the monument to those anxieties. In a mood of near-hysteria, or over-exuberance, or both, the provincial planners drafted an Act so full of mandatory steps to consult and reconsult the public at every step that it is expected to be wholly unworkable in practice, and therefore unlikely ever to be used.

under the O.H.A.P. program underwrote much of this local activity. Coincidentally, Metro Toronto also embarked on major reviews of its planning and transportation policies. Thus was launched one of the most frenetic periods of municipal planning in the history of the province. Such a level of activity seems unlikely to be repeated, at least in our time.

With the forces described above at work, elaborate measures to encourage and accommodate citizen participation were features of every planning program. As has been described in the preceding section, there were differences in content, style, cost and techniques, but they had in common an energetic pursuit of the public's attention, and a vigorous attempt to recruit citizens and citizen groups as active participants in all stages of the plan-making process.

Although few of the municipal plans commenced after 1972 have been completed and approved, at this writing the citizen participation phases in many of them are substantially complete. A full and fair assessment of the results will not be able to be made until later, but in some instances it seems apparent already that expectations may have exceeded the realizations. In other cases, it is clear that tangible benefits flowed from the participation program and that there is some degree of satisfaction, at least in official circles, with the results achieved in proportion to the time and effort expended.

In any case, the unevenness in the results need not trouble us here. For those concerned with the Planning Act Review, the important thing is that, at least so far, there has been no report that any of the public participation programs were in some way hampered or inhibited by the provisions of The Planning Act or by the lack therein of more specific requirements for public participation. It is clear that there has been no need for additional legislative guarantees to ensure citizen access to the plan-making process. The institutional and entrepreneurial forces which are ranged in opposition to the popular "slow growth" mood have never been successful (if they have ever tried) to exclude the public from the process.

Indeed, if any lesson has been taught by the experience of recent years, it is that the real problem for citizen participation programs continues to be how to attract and sustain public attention and interest, especially in planning matters which extend beyond local concern.

The recent Metro Plan Review experience illustrates the difficulty of securing continuing public involvement after many of the issues have ceased to be news, and the electoral battles have shifted the political balance in favour of a new general public mood.

It remains a fairly easy task to attract public attention to localized planning questions. However, in the wider issues which are the content of regional or metropolitan plans, it may be that broad public involvement will be experienced only periodically, when a fundamental change in public values and priorities occurs. Between times, it seems probable that the regional plan-makers can only expect active participation from that relatively small and usually influential cadre whose personal interests in civic affairs ensure at least some measure of non-professional, non-political, non-entrepreneurial input to the plan. Patently, broader public involvement in plan-making cannot be achieved by legislation, any more than voter turnouts can be improved by statutory means.

It is concluded that The Planning Act provisions for public participation need not be changed. Section 12(1)b of the Act already ensures that a basic level of participation is provided for. The existing requirement that public meetings should be held and information published would seem to be adequate as a legislative base. A similar provision regarding citizen participation should also be included in the Regional Acts.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

(November-December 1975)

District Municipality of Muskoka

Planning Director - Mr. G.C. Power

Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton

Commission of Planning - Mr. J. Wright

Public Liaison Officer - Mr. C. Bradshaw

Regional Municipality of Waterloo

Commissioner of Planning - Mr. W.E. Thomson

County of Hastings

Planning Director - Mr. N. Carney

City of Toronto

Area Planners - Ms. V. Bacon

Ms. C. Macdonald

Mr. R. Pilette

City of Hamilton

Commissioner of Planning - Mr. R. Bailey

Neighbourhood Planner - Mr. D. Lychak

Borough of Etobicoke

Planning Director - Mr. W. Sorenson

City of Barrie

Planning Director - Mr. W. Fairweather

Tiny-Tay Peninsula Planning Area

Planning Director - Mr. J. Faulkner

City of Sault Ste. Marie

Planning Director - Mr. J. Bain

Director of Development - Mr. G. Duffy



